

HISTORY WARS

The stars and creators of the original *NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM* couldn't resist a sequel, especially when it brings together some of the titans of history in a showdown for the ages – *BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN*...



The success of *Night at the Museum* had unintended but welcome consequences. It made history exciting. So much so it was reported that the American Museum of Natural History, in which the movie is set, increased its visitors by 20 percent following the movie's opening. It was a key factor in bringing star Ben Stiller back for a sequel. "For me, it was great to hear that the first movie actually inspired more people to go to museums. It's really nice to hear that kids are getting excited about museums in a time when there are so many other distractions," he says.

This time the action has moved to the Smithsonian Institute, the largest and most visited museum in the world. More than 150 years old, some 25 million visitors each year are dazzled and excited by all that lies within, from the awe-inspiring paintings in the National Gallery to the vintage planes in the National Air & Space Museum. "We wanted everything we did in the first movie to be not only bigger but better in the second," explains returning director Shawn Levy. "Ben Stiller and I had

always agreed that we wouldn't continue this tale unless we had a great new story – so when the idea came up of taking Larry and his friends to the Smithsonian, we knew this was it. We couldn't have been more excited."

It also reignited the passion of screenwriters Thomas Lennon and Robert Ben Garant, who adapted the beloved children's book by Milan Trenc, infusing it with their own spirited humour to create the first *Night at the Museum*.

Ben Stiller plays Larry Daley, a former security guard who is called back into action by his friends, Jedediah (Owen Wilson) and Octavius (Steve Coogan), two museum pieces who have come to life. They've been shipped to the Smithsonian where an evil plot is being brewed by the Egyptian ruler, Kahmunrah (Hank Azaria), who's in a particularly nasty mood after 3,000 years of slumber. He's being aided by a trio of history's most heinous henchmen – namely Ivan the Terrible (Christopher Guest), Napoleon Bonaparte (Alain Chabat) and Al Capone (Jon Bernthal) – in a plot to take over the museum (and then the globe), as they unleash the Army of the Underworld.

Some of the Smithsonian's most popular subjects helped to spark the writers' imaginations in totally new directions. The Air and Space Museum's tribute to adventurous aviator Amelia Earhart and the cherry red Lockheed Vega (in which she made her record-breaking flight across the Atlantic) transported



the writers – and subsequently Larry – into an unforeseen romance. When Amelia's statue comes to life she becomes not only Larry's savvy sidekick but also the unexpected romantic foil who reawakens his sense of fun. "From the moment we saw the Amelia Earhart display in the Air & Space Museum, we knew she would be the female character who helps Larry find his way home, literally and metaphorically," says screenwriter Thomas Lennon.

"The first movie was kind of lonely because it was Larry against the exhibits, but this time Larry has someone to run around the Smithsonian with, and that made it so much more fun," affirms Ben Stiller. ■

• *Night at the Museum - Battle of the Smithsonian* is out on DVD and Blu-ray on November 11.

